10

Practical Tips for a Successful Golf Club Website

1: MOBILE FRIENDLY A 'MUST'

It is an absolute must now that your website is 'mobile-friendly'. If it is not you are only making it unnecessarily hard for people to browse and navigate your website. Search engines do not like to show difficult to browse sites to people and so actively penalise 'non-mobile friendly' websites in mobile searches.

The majority of people looking for golf clubs on the web are using mobile or tablet devices. If you don't want your website to slip down the search rankings then make sure your website passes the 'mobile-friendly' test by Google. The test is free and only takes 10 seconds:

https://search.google.com/search-console/mobile-friendly

It is best for your website to be 'responsive' (adjust automatically to the size of the screen it is being viewed on) and not to have a separate version for mobile. For best results in search engine rankings and for effective sharing on social platforms it is best to only have one version of each page, otherwise you are diluting the effectiveness of each webpage.

2: SHOW OFF YOUR GOLF COURSE

It might seem obvious but to convince website visitors to come and play your golf course you have to show them how good the golf course looks first. There are a lot of golf club websites out there that don't prominently display good photos of the golf club and course.

Some dowdy and dull websites even do a good job of putting people off playing the golf course. There may well be 100 people visiting your golf club website every day – make sure you show them some great photos.

Spend some time and even some money getting a few really good pictures of the best parts of your golf course. Feature these photos prominently on the front-page and throughout the website. Tempt people who find your website into coming to play your course. If you don't have some really good photos of your golf course you can't have a really good website either.

Golf Course Flyover's are also a great way of showing off your golf course. Videos help engage people and sell your golf course. The longer someone spends on your website browsing photos and videos the better chance there is that they'll want to come & play the course too.

3: TRY TO BE USEFUL

Forget SEO or Search Engine Optimisation 'tricks' that used to work 20 years ago. Good SEO now means lots of useful and relevant information. When you are writing a webpage always keep the website visitor in mind and do not write the page thinking about search engines and SEO. Search engines these days will penalise your website if they think you have been intentionally trying to 'optimise' your site for search engines or have been 'keyword stuffing'.

It is best to try to put yourselves in the shoes of your visitor and to include all the information about your club and course that could be useful to them. Even include information about the local area, things to do nearby, where to stay etc.

Give the page a clear descriptive title and split the text up into sections with sub-headings which make for easy reading.

DO NOT copy and paste information from other internet sources onto your website. Search engines immediately recognise and penalise copied text.

4: UPDATE REGULARLY

Search engines do not want to show old information to people and they now run checks on how frequently the website is updated. No one wants to read outdated information so you need to make an effort to update the website at least a few times a month and preferably a couple of times a week. A 'Latest News' section that displays throughout the website is a good way to keep the website 'dynamic', also an 'Upcoming Events' section that shows the next 4 or 5 events can keep people coming back to your website to check what's going on.

People also always love a 'Special Offer' so keep these fresh and try to make sure that visitors have a reason to visit your website again.

Add a section for course reviews and actively collect from visiting groups and societies – this is another source for new and updated website information.

The above sections like 'Latest News', 'Upcoming Events', 'Reviews' and 'Special Offers' are called 'dynamic' because once you update them they can show automatically all around the website making sure every page has some new information on it, which is looked on favourably by the search engines and by real people.

Remember UPDATE and keep things fresh.

5: MAKE CONTACTING YOU EASY

Make sure people can contact you easily via your website at any time of the day or night. If a website visitor decides they want to play at your club, join your club or eat at your restaurant then give them a way to register their interest then and there. Most clubs will display a telephone number but how many hours a week are you absolutely sure someone can get through on the telephone? Many golf clubs only have part time staff in the office, telephones are often engaged, the Pro might be giving a lesson, the manager might be putting out another fire and many visitors will browse your site in the evenings when there is no one to answer the telephones anyway.

Most clubs will also display an e-mail address but the preferred method is an online contact form (**Check your contact form is working, lost enquiries = potential lost revenue**). One method that is shown to boost enquiries is to have an easy method of contact on every page of the website or 'Quick Contact Buttons' so the visitor can easily fire off an enquiry from wherever they are on the website. It is worth considering linking contact forms up to your smart phone so you can react quickly to any important enquiries (large restaurant bookings for the next day, large group or society enquiries). Strike while the iron is hot and pleasantly surprise visitors with quick replies.

6: ADVERTISE YOUR RESTAURANT

The clubhouse restaurant and bar is typically becoming an ever more important source of revenue and a way to attract visitors to the club. With smoke free dining, more and more people are looking online for good places to eat.

Spend a bit of extra time creating a page dedicated to the clubhouse, its facilities, bar and restaurant. Add some nice pictures of the dining area with made-up tables or people eating and enjoying themselves. Put up tempting pictures of the food and upload typical menus. Don't forget to include opening times, functions catered for, instructions for booking and any other information which could be useful to someone looking for a place to eat out.

If your club is proud of its catering it is worth creating a TripAdvisor page where a collection of good reviews can earn you a 'Certificate of Excellence' that you can then display prominently on your page. A TripAdvisor certificate adds a level of trust and can sway potential customers in your favour.

A 'Quick Contact Button' on your restaurant page that sends an e-mail directly to the catering manager will make it easier for people to send booking enquiries at any time of day or night.

7: GENERATE WEBSITE TRAFFIC

The first and most important source of website traffic is Google. If you have followed the advice in this guide and have been busy updating the website regularly, with lots of useful and relevant information, that is set out well with clear headings and sub-headings then Google will happily be sending traffic your way.

Also try to get other websites to include a link to your golf club – local hotels and guest houses, tourist websites, the local council, local schools (especially if you run any junior initiatives). This is called 'link-building' and can boost your website in the search engine rankings.

Facebook is another great way to generate traffic to your website. Every page on your website should have social share icons placed prominently. Once you publish anything new on the website like a news item, or an upcoming event, or a positive review, or a special offer it is best to then share that page on the club's Facebook and/or Twitter page. This will give Facebook and Twitter users a 'taster' and will invite them to click to 'read more' on your website helping to generate traffic and also giving other Facebook or Twitter users a chance to 'share' your page amongst their friends too.

8: E-MAIL MARKETING

E-mail marketing, or the sending of electronic newsletters, is a good way of keeping not only your membership base informed of upcoming events and important news from around the club but also of keeping in touch with potential green fee payers, societies and even possible future members.

At the most basic level you should be collecting e-mail addresses via a 'subscribe' box on the website. From the admin panel it is also a good idea to have different lists like 'Members List', 'Societies List', 'Past Green Fee Payers' (have a little form that collects name & e-mail addresses when people pay for their round in the Pro shop or manager's office). You can then send out different newsletters targeting different groups and encouraging them to 'read more' on your website.

It is possible for a website to automatically generate and send out newsletters so you don't need to spend any time doing it. Newsletters can be automatically generated and sent to all members detailing upcoming events for the month and important news from around the club. Latest green fee and membership offers can also be automatically sent to societies and past green-fee payers. E-newsletters are a really useful way of generating website traffic.

9: GET TO KNOW YOUR VISITORS

Google Analytics is the market leading, and completely free, tool that tracks and records everything that website visitors do on your website. It not only tracks visitor numbers but can tell you where your visitors are from, how they found your site, what pages they looked at on your site, how long they spent on each page and a whole load of potentially useful information. There are other tools used but many do not exclude SPAM visits and present hugely inflated and inaccurate visitor numbers.

You should definitely have Google Analytics installed on your website. It runs quietly in the background and will tell you whether your most important pages are being looked at, whether people for some reason aren't spending long on some pages that you would like them to, whether members are using the members area at all, whether an online magazine that you chose to advertise with is sending you much traffic, whether you got much traffic the day that you published an advert in the local paper, and it will even allow you to work out how valuable those visitors were to you (did they send you an enquiry about green fees or did they leave your site after 5 seconds?).

With Google Analytics you can measure everything and you can make sure your website is performing how you'd like it to.

10: SECURE WEBSITES (https ://)

Google now puts extra emphasis on secure websites and insists that all websites, even if not handling sensitive data, are encrypted and therefore secure. You website address needs to ALWAYS start with https:// and not only http://. Why? Google wants everyone to surf the web securely and safely and if your website doesn't allow that then Google will be penalising your website. This is what Google says about its plans for websites that do not use https:

"You should always protect all of your websites with HTTPS, even if they don't handle sensitive communications. Aside from providing critical security and data integrity for both your websites and your users' personal information, HTTPS is a requirement for many new browser features. Eventually, we plan to label all HTTP pages as non-secure, and change the HTTP security indicator to the red triangle that we use for broken HTTPS."
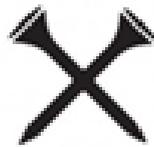
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